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DEPARTMENT FOR DRL

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SUBJECT: UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
IN SRI LANKA

REF: SECSTATE 267453

1. Per Reftel, Mission submits the draft report on  
Supporting Human Rights and Democracy in Sri Lanka.

Begin text.

Sri Lanka is a longstanding democratic republic with an active multiparty system. For more than 20 years, Sri Lanka has struggled with an internal war between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The government of Sri Lanka controls most of the country, but the LTTE controls roughly 15 percent of Sri Lanka in the North and East and has influence in an additional 15 percent of the country. This war and the underlying ethnic and religious differences that have fueled the war have had a significant impact on human rights and democracy issues in Sri Lanka.

The United States has taken an active role in pressing for greater human rights and democracy initiatives in Sri Lanka. For most of 2004, U.S. human rights and democracy initiatives focused on the peace process and on bolstering democratic foundations such as freedom of the press, fair labor practices and the rights of women and children. However, the December 26, 2004 tsunami resulted in rapid and widespread efforts to ensure that relief efforts were effective and that the distribution of aid was fair.

In a joint U.S. government effort, which included U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the military, the U.S. has contributed to the distribution of aid and supplies to areas devastated by the tsunami. Additionally, USAID has granted \$350,000 to the local office of the American Center for International Labor Solidarity to help people displaced as a result of the tsunami obtain legal services necessary to document land claims and file missing persons reports. This grant has also been used to address issues related to an increase in the problem of human trafficking after the tsunami, discussed more fully below.

As part of the diverse outreach to address human rights in Sri Lanka, the Mission organized numerous international visitor (IV) programs. Through the IV program, two Sri Lankans participated in the "Student Leaders in Civic Responsibility" symposium; two more participants attended a symposium in the United States on effecting political and economic change; and a Buddhist monk was sponsored to participate in an IV program on civic education in religious schools.

In June of 2004, the United States also worked jointly with North Illinois University (NIU) to establish a program to help women entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka gain greater economic and bargaining power. Also in conjunction with NIU, the United States established a training program for NGOs in Sri Lanka. Through this program, NGOs are able to gain training on how to better foster human rights and democracy in their respective areas. After the training, the NGOs are able to publicize their management training, thereby gaining greater confidence from their donors and the recipients of their services.

The United States provided a \$5,000 grant to the Sri Lankan Press Institute, the only independent institution working for greater press freedoms, so it could begin a library and purchase textbooks. As part of a separate initiative designed to help needy women and children, the United States worked with the International Red Cross to distribute information to health clinics on the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

One of the major democracy initiatives in 2004 involved the Sri Lankan national election. The U.S. Government monitored the election by sending 11 teams to different locations around the country. (No U.S. government teams were sent into the LTTE-controlled areas.) The teams reported that even in the non-LTTE controlled northern part of Sri Lanka there was evidence of vote rigging and ballot falsification. However, in the South the election was conducted in a democratic fashion.

Additionally, USAID granted \$600,000 to the National

Democratic Institute for International Affairs to fund the two largest indigenous election monitoring groups in Sri Lanka. For the first time, these Sri Lankan NGOs were allowed in the polling places and were able to observe the conditions under which the election was conducted in places that the 11 U.S. government groups were unable to go. In October 2004, USAID sponsored a national symposium on electoral reform based in part on the observations of the local election monitoring groups.

For the second year in a row, USAID conducted a national survey on the rule of law and the Sri Lankan peace process with more than 3,500 respondents. The results were used to provide feedback to the Sri Lankan government on how it can better implement the democratic rule of law.

In line with the Mission's goal of helping Sri Lankans achieve a political solution to the ethnic conflict, the Embassy focused on retraining Sri Lanka police to transition from a paramilitary organization to one focused on community policing. With U.S. funds, members of the U.S. law enforcement community led courses on basic investigative techniques and management and worked with Sri Lankan counterparts to integrate the skills and techniques into the local law enforcement curriculum.

Human rights training is a key component of all U.S.-Sri Lankan military-to-military programs. The United States has sent senior Sri Lankan military officers to professional military education courses in the United States and funded Sri Lankan attendees at senior service schools.

Sri Lanka is predominately Buddhist, but it also has a sizeable Christian, Hindu and Muslim population. There has been documented evidence of harassment of Christians, especially those belonging to evangelical denominations, by the Buddhist majority. In 2004, Ambassador Lunstead held high-level meetings with the President and then-Prime Minister of Sri Lanka concerning religious freedom.

Throughout the year, U.S. officials met privately with Sri Lanka government officials to discuss the dangers of proposed religious "anti-conversion" legislation designed to make it more difficult for a person to switch from Buddhism to other religions. To date, the legislation has not passed and the United States continues to encourage government and religious leaders to find non-legislative means for addressing these religious issues.

In February 2004, the U.S. Department of Labor's Deputy Undersecretary for International Labor Affairs, Arnold Levine, visited Sri Lanka to promote free trade initiatives. Undersecretary Levine met with the Sri Lanka Labor Minister, trade unions and the Employers' Federation. He also visited a textile factory. The U.S. Department of Labor, through the International Labor Organization (ILO), continues to fund programs in Sri Lanka designed to eliminate child labor and help children who are the victims of trafficking and sexual abuse.

In addition to the efforts of the Department of Labor, in September 2004, U.S. Department of State Ambassador-at-Large, Cofer Black, and Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Affairs, Christina Rocca, met with Sri Lankan Government officials to discuss issues related to the LTTE's recruitment of child soldiers, child labor abuses and problems related to trafficking of women and children for the sex trade.

The United States funded a conference for Sri Lankan criminal justice personnel to enhance their professional capabilities in regard to the trafficking of women and exploitation of children. In conjunction with the Sri Lankan National Child Protection Agency, the Embassy organized the conference, which featured presentations by three U.S. government criminal justice personnel working in this field. As mentioned above, a significant portion of the \$350,000 grant to the American Center for International Labor Solidarity is also being used to combat an increase in trafficking after the tsunami.

End text.

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